

CALIFORNIA VETERANS ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION



THE ALLIANCE

CVAF, 2215 Buena Vista Street #1, Bakersfield, CA 93304 661-324-2001

Fall 2008 – Issue 2

VETERANS HELPING VETERANS

Dear Reader,

As we are going into the holiday season, many of our thoughts are focused on the spirit of giving. I know with the economy right now, the giving level from everyone this year will probably be much lower than in the past. Being that we are a 501(c)3, non-profit organization, it is those donations we receive from businesses and the general public, that can bring us from barely making ends meet to being able to have some extras for our veterans for the holidays.

Many of our residents either have no relatives nearby or relatives that have disowned them, leaving them alone and left out of all the festivities of the holidays that they fondly remember from their past. Here at the California Veterans Assistance Foundation, we try to provide some extra activities and goodies during this time of year, to help our residents stay busy and feeling good at a time which can be very depressing for them. During past holidays, we have experienced some of our vets go from doing fantastic in their program, to going into a depression and ultimately regressing and going back on alcohol and/or drugs. So trying to help them maintain a good healthy attitude by keeping them busy and filling their lives with the little extra things they normally don't have is very important to help them make it

through this time of year.

In the past for the holidays, we have made sure the residents have all they need to prepare full course meals, along with cooking classes before time to help with unanswered questions that they may have about the preparation. Last year in our new classroom, we had them prepare and bake several different kinds of pies; they were all really excited and amazed that when they were finished, their pies were actually edible and really delicious. Several residents went back to their apartments and made several more; we even heard them bragging about "whose pies were better." The past five years, we also have had our annual CVAF Christmas Cookie Baking event. Residents with the help of a staff member, mix, bake, frost and decorate hundreds of cookies for the Christmas party that is held each year for all the veterans in the program. Lots of laughs, lunch and some burnt cookies later, they all go away with baking skills, camaraderie and a sense of belonging, along with a sugar high from all the cookie sampling.

We try to, if funds permit, give every resident a Christmas present each year; phone cards, gift cards to department stores or movie theaters, etc. Several times we have also had persons, churches or organizations donate money, new clothing, food, soda or holiday goodies for our veterans. You will never know the appreciation and gratitude

these veterans have for those unexpected donations that mean so much to them. Many veterans feel that they have served their country, but their country has forgotten all about them; especially now, when they are in need of a helping hand from their country.

So please, during this holiday season, give a thought to the veterans who have fought for this great country and express your gratitude for those heroes by making a donation to show that you care. There are many ways that you can donate, go to our Web site at www.cavaf.org and click on donate or send your check to CVAF, 2215 Buena Vista Street #1, Bakersfield, CA 93304 or call our office during work hours 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, at 661-399-2490 about dropping off in person, donations such as food or other needed items. You will also find a list on the back page of this newsletter with ideas for donations to the program. Please know that your gift, large or small, will be deeply appreciated and used solely by the veterans that we serve here at the California Veterans Assistance Foundation.

We thank you for your support and may you and yours have a blessed Christmas and a prosperous 2009.

Sincerely,

Robert R. Piaro, President
California Veterans Assistance Foundation

KEEP OLD GLORY FLYING

A VETERANS DAY TRIBUTE



Residents enjoying the "Keep Old Glory Flying" event and showing their patriotism.

A special event to honor Kern County's veterans was held on Saturday evening, November 8, 2008 at Buck Owens Crystal Palace and presented by ACAP Products, K-GET TV and KUZZ-FM 107.9. This was the third year that the CVAF residents and staff have been invited to attend the event. Emcees for the evening were Robin Mangarin and Jim Scott, anchors for TV Channel 17 and

also Steve Gradowitz of KUZZ radio.

The nights' events included entertainment by some of Bakersfield's own local talent, including; Melanie Nightingale, Jeff Edwards, Sara Alisia Gonzalez and Ross Vercammen. Along with the great entertainment, a wonderful dinner was served to all the veterans in attendance, making the event a most enjoyable experience. Thanks to everyone responsible for making this event happen and for the invitation to the CVAF veterans. It was thoroughly enjoyed and deeply appreciated. "Keep Old Glory Flying."

STAFF SENTIMENTS



“Since I started employment with the California Veterans Assistance Foundation July 16th, 2007, I have seen the foundation grow and many residents leave the program now that they have the skills to be an

important part of society. I love what I do; it gives me a sense of pride and unknown happiness that I am able to help a fellow veteran through their hard times.

I am glad I found CVAF, it is a great place to work and the benefits are tremendous – when your fellow Veteran can lift their heads up high, because now they have pride once again in their life and they believe so much in their hearts that they do matter. I honestly believe without CVAF, many of our heroes would still be forgotten.”

Linda Williams
CVAF Operations Director

WELCOME ABOARD, THOMAS COLE



Thomas Cole, CVAF Case Manager

Recently, a new member has joined the CVAF staff team as a case manager and we are all excited to have him with us.

Thomas Cole served his country in the U.S. Navy from May of 1988 thru March of 1989 as a Religious Program Specialist. Originally from the east coast, Thomas and his wife, Michelle, now reside in Bakersfield with their two young daughters, Morgan (4) and Madison (1).

When asked about his interests, he says his beautiful daughters are on the top of his list, but he also enjoys working out, loves his Virginia Tech Hokie’s Football, gardening, cooking, hiking and outdoor photography. He also said “he enjoys working with veterans and enjoys the opportunity that he is presented here at CVAF.”

NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS

California Veterans Assistance Foundation joins the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Kern County and its “FRONTLINE” project, along with the annual NAMI WALKS for the Mind of America event, walk and fundraiser.

Project “FRONTLINE” was launched October 2, 2007 by Russ Sempell, MFT, President of NAMI-Kern County and Patrice Maniaci at Good Samaritan Hospital Southwest in Bakersfield, California. This project continues to provide support and education to all veterans, particularly for those family members with loved ones who are veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) of Iraq or Afghanistan. Frontline helps many of these veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety, sleep disorders and alcohol and drug abuse, by providing information, guidance and referrals for the veterans readjustment to civilian life.

NAMI of Kern County has sought out the qualified and experienced members of the community to panel its steering committee. They include educators, doctors and therapists, the faith community, and veterans that are currently experiencing and those who have overcome life changing issues resulting



Pictured from left: Russ Sempell, Patrice Maniaci and Charles Robinson.

from war time service. CVAF Programs Director, Charles Robinson, has been a vital part of the steering committee since its inception, as a committee member and events keynote speaker.

NAMI WALKS for the Mind of America is a nationwide fundraising and mental health awareness program that is being held in more than 70 communities around the country in 2008. It is expected that these walks will raise \$8 million for NAMI and the mental health services it provides to thousands of families across the country. CVAF is honored and proud to support NAMI Kern County in this endeavor and join with TEAM FRONTLINE at the event, walk and fundraiser.

VETERANS DAY EVENTS A BIG HIT!

Every year the residents of our program have been given the opportunity to march in the annual Bakersfield Veterans Day Parade, with transportation to and from the event provided by CVAF. We have surpassed our previous parade participant record again this year! Thirty-four residents, former residents and staff members marched in the parade representing CVAF. Everyone that marched was amazed at all the applause and cheering that came from the crowds as they went by.

An added bonus for the residents was the Applebee’s restaurant promotion of a free dinner to all veterans on Veterans Day. After marching in the parade and working up an appetite, our veterans got a chance to sit down, relax and have an enjoyable dinner free of charge, which was a real treat for them.

Thank You, Applebee’s, for honoring our veterans on Veterans Day. Your generosity is very deeply appreciated.



Some of the residents and staff that marched in the Veterans Day Parade.



Free dinner for veterans at Applebee’s.

HIGHLIGHT A VETERAN



Douglas Davidson, before and after.

In August of 2005, I had hand surgery to correct a hereditary defect. After six (6) months of physical therapy and numerous trips to various

doctors to combat the pain and suffering, it was determined the hand would never again operate as designed. I went on state disability a week after the surgery.

My wife of 23 years had also been sick and unable to work since she underwent triple bypass surgery in 2001. In February of 2006, my wife was admitted into a local hospital with a variety of ailments. While hospitalized, my wife was diagnosed with three (3) other life-threatening diseases, which in combination with the original problem, sent her back into the hospital and proved to be fatal. On April 7, 2006, my wife lost the battle and I lost my world.

In August 2006 my state disability insurance payments ended. When I lost my apartment, I turned to my stepchildren for support; all but one said they could not help. The one that did say yes told me I had to leave her place after only three (3) weeks. September, October, November and December of 2006 I was sneaking into hospitals stealing food and occasionally sleeping in ICU waiting rooms. The majority of the time I was sleeping in my car, in the parking lots of the hospitals. I was contemplating suicide or maybe committing a felony to get arrested, just to get off the streets and have the "three hots and a cot" provided in jail. I had applied for SSDI as soon as the state disability ended, but had no idea as to when, or even if, it would be approved, even with all the doctor reports stating my disabilities were permanent and I was unable to work.

One week before Christmas 2006, I decided to apply for food stamps, welfare or anything that the Department of Human Services had to offer. I was awarded food stamps on Christmas Eve, and was directed to go to the County Veterans Services Office (CVSO) and apply for any service- or non-service-connected benefits available to me. I thank God every day that the Department of Human Services required me to go to the CVSO!

On January 11, 2007, I learned that because of my honorable service in the United States Marine Corp, being a Vietnam veteran and disabled, I was eligible for non-service-connected pension and medical services. My CVSO representative introduced me to the CVAF intake specialist, who told me about a safe, sober living environment that I may also be eligible for. I was shown pictures of the complex where I might be living, if I passed a baseline drug and alcohol test and proved that I was negative for T.B. As we filled out the papers, I broke down and cried; I couldn't believe it!

Two weeks later, I walked through the gates of heaven on earth! Charles Robinson, Bob and Judy Piaro and the rest of the staff of the California Veterans Assistance Foundation, welcomed me without doubts, prejudice or reservations. Since I've been here at CVAF, I've been able to rebuild my self-esteem, my self-respect and my dignity; I've had open

VETERAN, continued on page 4



SPOTLIGHT ON DREYER'S ICE CREAM OF BAKERSFIELD



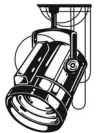
Dreyer's Ice Cream has become very involved and generous in their contributions to service providers in Bakersfield and Kern County. Recently, Dreyer's Ice Cream along with other numerous Bakersfield-based companies, co-hosted the Olive Drive Church Patriotic Sunday and Veterans Fundraiser event. The California Veterans Assistance Foundation (CVAF) was this year's fundraiser recipient. Dreyer's Ice Cream donated 500 bars of ice cream to sell at the event, with 100% of the proceeds of the event being donated to CVAF.



CVAF recognizes and applauds Dreyer's Ice Cream of Bakersfield, California and specifically recognizes two of its employees who were very instrumental in making the event a success. Pictured from left: Patty Tate, Director of Product Improvement; Charles Robinson, CVAF Programs Director; and Sean Carlsen, Director of Health & Wellness and also a Vietnam Veteran.



SPOTLIGHT ON OLIVE DRIVE CHURCH FUNDRAISER SUPPORTS CVAF



For the past four years, Olive Drive Church of Bakersfield, California has paid tribute to the veterans of Bakersfield and our nation, by planting 500 American flags on the church grounds and organizing a BBQ fundraiser, with all profits being donated to a local veteran's organization. CVAF proudly accepted the appointment by Marilyn Stone, Olive Drive Church Media and Communications Director, to be the recipient of this year's fundraiser donation. CVAF staff, residents and family members participated in all aspects of the event and were treated to BBQ beef and BBQ chicken sandwiches, baked beans and soft drinks that were being sold for the event.

Olive Drive Church has also been supportive of CVAF in the past. Occasionally some of the church members have dropped off underwear and socks, as well as donations of food and clothing at the holidays. A member of the church, who owns a limo, picked up some of our residents with his limo and took them to an event going on in the area. The veterans were thrilled to be able to experience such a luxury, and one they will probably never forget. Several of our residents have been attending services



Pictured is Marilyn Stone, Media and Communications Director of Olive Drive Church.

at Olive Drive Church and have stated that they have been very welcomed and accepted, and enjoy being a part of their worshipping community. Olive Drive Church is a very short distance from the CVAF Decatur Street site, so veterans can easily walk or bike to church whenever they would like, which is especially handy for those veterans who don't have vehicles or gas money.

Many thanks go out to Olive Drive Church and its many members who have been very supportive of CVAF and its veterans. We appreciate everything you have done to make our veterans' lives happy and fulfilled. God bless all of you!

CVAF WISH LIST

Personal Care Items:

Toothbrushes/holders
Toothpaste
Dental Floss
Foot Powder
Shampoo
Conditioner
Combs
Brushes
Disposable Shavers
Shaving Cream
Bar Soap
Lotion
Liquid Hand Soap
Kleenex
Fingernail/Toenail Clippers
Bath Towels/Washcloths
Deodorant
Bar Soap Holder/Container
Baby Oil
Vaseline
Dentures – Bath, Cleaner, Adhesive

Laundry Items:

Fabric softener Sheets
Laundry bags (mesh type)
Sewing Kits

Recreational Items:

Movies
Ball Gloves
Baseball Bats
Bicycle Tire Repair Kits
26" Tire Tubes for Bikes
Board Games
Crossword Puzzles
Greeting Cards
Pens, pencils
Envelopes
Stamps
Stationery
Softballs
Books

Clothing:

Good used clothing is fine.
House Slippers (Sizes 8-13)

T-shirts (S, M, L, XL, 2XL)
Underwear (S, M, L, XL, 2XL)
Socks – Athletic (Sizes 8-13)
Men's jeans (Waist sizes 32 to 42)
Shower shoes/flip flops (M, L, XL)
Tennis Shoes
Winter – Hats, Gloves, Boots, Coats

Household Supplies:

Coffee mugs (plastic)
Pillows

While donations of any kind are always welcome, please call the Center at 661-399-2490 before making any donations of the above listed items. Cash donations are always needed and welcomed. As always, the residents and staff thank you for your kind thoughts and generous support.

SEMI ANNUAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING HELD IN TOMAH, WISCONSIN

The CVAF/VAF Board of Directors met in Tomah, Wisconsin in August 2008 for their semi-annual Board of Directors meeting. The meetings are rotated twice a year between Bakersfield, CA and Tomah, WI. CVAF hosts the board meeting in Bakersfield the second week of February, and VAF hosts the meeting in Tomah, WI mid-August each year. Summer in Wisconsin is very pleasant and enjoyable, but needless to say, the winter meeting being held there was highly discouraged by the CVAF BOD members. All board members were present and the meeting was very productive.

A BBQ lunch was again prepared by SPAC members (Special Projects Action Committee) for the BOD members, staff and all the VAF residents. A good time was had by everyone, which included the warm sunny weather, the beautiful location on the VA grounds, playing cards, visiting and a couple of residents even played some favorite tunes on their guitars, which everyone really loved. The board members enjoyed their lunch break, especially talking with the resident veterans and answering any questions they had about the program.

CVAF JOINS THE "KEEP KERN ROADS CLEAN" PROGRAM

Commonly known as the Adopt-A-Highway program, the "KEEP KERN ROADS CLEAN" program is the road to a cleaner community in the city of Bakersfield and surrounding Kern County. Individuals, organizations and businesses volunteer to clean-up sections of roadside within Kern County's Road Side System. From Lost Hills to Boron; Shafter to Frazier Park; Lamont to Inyo Kern; flyaway trash, tossed out litter and illegal dumping plague the roadways of Kern County. This is a joint program of the Kern County Roads Department, the Kern County Waste Management Department and the nonprofit environmental organization

Community Clean Sweep.

CVAF is proud to become part of the "KEEP KERN ROADS CLEAN" program and having the responsibility of maintaining the 2 mile stretch of road located on Manor Rd. between N. Chester Ave. and the Roberts Ln. interchange. Both residents and staff put on a safety vest, grabbed a trash bag and volunteered their time to the Keep Kern Roads Clean project.



VETERAN, continued from page 3

heart surgery, full dental reconstruction (at no cost to me) and my mental health issues have all been addressed and for the most part, resolved.

I don't have the words to describe my feelings

of gratitude and thanks for everything that CVAF has done for me. I know that without this program and these veterans, I would have been dead, incarcerated or both by now. God Bless You All!

Sincerely,

Douglas P. Davidson, (aka Do-Rite)

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

Providing services takes money; foundations and corporations fight hard for a share of big federal and state grants. The California Veterans Assistance Foundation relies on the generosity of people like you to help end the national disgrace of homeless veterans who are (MIA) missing in America.

Please send your tax-deductible donations to:

**California Veterans Assistance
Foundation, Inc.**
2215 Buena Vista Street, # 1
Bakersfield, CA 93304

Please help us to continue our efforts to help those veterans who need a "Hand-up and not a hand-out."

CVAF MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to help veterans or at risk of becoming homeless veterans, regain, maintain, and improve their status in society by providing an alcohol and drug-free, secure environment through which a wide array of human services can be accessed in an atmosphere of dignity and mutual concern.

CVAF RESIDENTS VOLUNTEER AT ST. PHILIPS CATHOLIC CHURCH

For the past four (4) years at Thanksgiving and Christmas, the residents at CVAF are called upon to volunteer their services at St. Philips Catholic Church to help prepare food baskets for some of the less fortunate families of Bakersfield.

St. Philips provides snacks, drinks and lunch for the residents during the two (2) day event for both Thanksgiving and Christmas, with an added bonus of a fully-stocked food basket with all the trimmings, including a turkey, for every apartment and house that CVAF operates.

REMEMBER ALWAYS

It is the Soldier, not the reporter, who has given us freedom of the press;

It is the Soldier, not the poet, who has given us freedom of speech;

It is the Soldier, not the politicians, who ensures our right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness;

And it is the Soldier who salutes the Flag, who serves beneath the Flag, and whose coffin is draped by the Flag.